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Letter dated 23 June 2009 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly

You may recall that the Alliance of Civilizations was established in 2005 under the auspices of the United Nations, at the initiative of the Governments of Spain and Turkey, in order to develop the agenda for good governance of cultural diversity at both the global and local levels, and help to counter divisions, polarization and extremism within and among societies.

I am pleased to note that the Alliance initiative has attracted broad political support — the Group of Friends now numbers more than 100 members, primarily States but also international organizations — and that a range of countries have adopted national strategies to advance its goals. It further benefits from the creative involvement of a steadily growing number of partners, including different components of civil society, media, religious leaders, the business community and foundations.

In a world of increasing complexity and tensions, I see the Alliance as progressively demonstrating its distinctive role and potential, along with other efforts and initiatives developed to diminish tensions and to bridge divides of a cultural nature. I look forward to more countries joining the Group of Friends and actively supporting the Alliance.

The High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, President Jorge Sampaio, has submitted to me his second annual report highlighting the main activities carried out between May 2008 and May 2009 in accordance with the implementation plan, which defined the principles of action and set out concrete initiatives aimed at providing the Alliance with a strategic and structural framework as well as a political agenda.

In his letter to me, the High Representative noted that significant progress was made on the implementation of the main commitments made at the 2008 Madrid Forum of the Alliance, and that several major new initiatives were launched at the recent Istanbul Forum, which confirm the action-oriented character of the Alliance. The High Representative went on to stress that the Alliance "is enjoying a period of unprecedented momentum and expectations are high regarding the commitments and

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announcements made during the Forum" and that there was all-round commitment to seeing each of these initiatives realized as the Alliance works towards the next Forum in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on 28 and 29 May 2010.

I am pleased to convey to you the second annual report which the High Representative submitted to me together with the second implementation plan, covering the period from June 2009 to June 2011.

(*Signed*) **Ban** Ki-moon

Alliance of Civilizations: second annual report of the High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations

16 June 2009

Summary

The present report highlights the main activities carried out by the High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations and his secretariat from May 2008 to May 2009, in accordance with both the implementation plan, submitted to the Secretary-General on 14 June 2007, and the addendum made to it following the first Forum of the Alliance, held in Madrid in January 2008.

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I. Introduction

1. Established in 2005 under the auspices of the United Nations, at the initiative of the Governments of Spain and Turkey, the Alliance of Civilizations aims to develop the agenda for the good governance of cultural diversity with both a global and a local perspective, and, in the process, helps to counter divisions, polarization and extremism within and among societies.

2. In April 2007, after a High-level Group of 20 eminent personalities had produced a report exploring the roots of polarization between cultures and societies and proposed a set of recommendations to address this growing trend, the Secretary-General appointed a High Representative, to advance the process through the development of practical initiatives.

3. In June 2007, the High Representative, the former President of Portugal, Jorge Sampaio, developed an implementation plan for 2007-2009, which defined the principles of action and set out concrete initiatives aimed at providing the Alliance with a strategic and structural framework as well as with a political agenda. The plan was revised and enlarged in the light of the first Alliance of Civilizations Forum held in Madrid in January 2008. Early in the same year, the High Representative submitted a first annual report to the Secretary-General, who relayed the document to the President of the General Assembly (see A/63/336).

4. In the period covered by this second annual report (May 2008-May 2009), the Alliance has worked towards shaping its agenda for the good governance of cultural diversity at a global level, promoting national plans and regional strategies for intercultural dialogue among its member States, developing its network of partnerships and identifying the most innovative grass-roots projects across the world. At the same time, priority was given to the cross-cultural polarization in relations between Muslim and Western societies, particularly in the Euro-Mediterranean area. Referenced in the report of the High-level Group, this polarization remained a source of particular concern throughout the year and the High Representative dedicated multiple efforts to addressing it, including political talks, consultations with a wide range of actors or analysts and initiatives with partners, namely during two major critical moments since the Madrid Forum, the *Fitna* episode and the Gaza crisis.

5. From May 2008 to May 2009, work has been focused on (a) broadening the support base of the Alliance through the Group of Friends network of member countries and international organizations; (b) enlarging and improving the cooperation and the coordination with agencies and specialized bodies of the United Nations system, as well as with other key organizations and regional processes, particularly within the scope of existing memoranda of understanding and common plans of action; (c) widening and deepening the global network of partnerships with civil society, the private sector and media organizations, all groups that can act as forces of moderation and understanding; and (d) implementing the 10 main commitments made at the Madrid Forum of the Alliance. In the process, one of the key priorities of the Alliance was to ensure the success of the Second Forum of the Alliance, convened in April 2009 in Istanbul, at the invitation of the Government of Turkey, and to provide a mechanism for implementing the projects that were launched at the Forum.

II. Consolidating the Alliance as a United Nations political initiative for the good governance of cultural diversity

6. During the past 12 months, the High Representative's action and his engagement with the international community were based on the conviction that the global agenda for the good governance of cultural diversity, which the Alliance has been entrusted to develop and implement, is not only a core element of a culture of peace; it is also the fourth pillar of sustainable development.

7. As an inclusive, multi-stakeholders' platform for dialogue and results-oriented action, the Alliance has gradually carved out its role within the United Nations system. It now appears as a main catalyst and facilitator for innovative projects aimed at reducing polarization between nations and cultures, as well as a major bridge-builder and convener, connecting people and organizations devoted to promoting trust and understanding between diverse communities, particularly — but not exclusively — between Muslim and Western societies.

8. Avoiding the pitfalls of long-standing fault lines that divide the broader constituency of United Nations Member States, and through a broad dialogue-based and consensus-building approach, the Alliance maintained its momentum during this sometimes troubled period: it was able to attract new members, build consensus within its constituency and deliver on its objectives.

9. The aforementioned efforts helped the Alliance to significantly raise its profile within the global governance agenda. This is one of the major political achievements of the past year.

10. Over the past 12 months, the Alliance has increasingly worked as a global matchmaker. It has helped to connect innovative, groundbreaking grass-roots initiatives with policymakers and potential funders who can help to scale up these projects and give them global prominence. The Alliance was associated with more than 100 events, conferences and initiatives related to media, youth, education and migration issues aimed at promoting intercultural and interreligious dialogue.

III. Shaping the building blocks of the Alliance

11. Significant efforts were made towards consolidating the Alliance's three pillars — Governments, international organizations and civil society — and reinforcing its main building blocks. The steady enlargement and consolidation of the Group of Friends and the development of a global network of civil society organizations allowed the Alliance to advance its objectives in three main directions, namely (a) inclusion of the Alliance's goals in the national agendas of member States through the implementation of national plans for intercultural dialogue; (b) incorporating the Alliance into regional processes — either via regional organizations or local representations of international organizations — in order to create synergies and leverage work that is already under way; and (c) engaging civil society in its various components (non-governmental organizations, faith-based organizations and groups, foundations, universities, the private sector, etc.) in joint activities under the auspices or the lead of the Alliance, as one of its key building blocks, to reach its ultimate goal — producing change on the ground.

Enlargement and reinforcement of the Group of Friends

12. Support for the Alliance of Civilizations continued to grow significantly, with an increase of 21 per cent in membership, thus bringing the number of members of the Group of Friends from 85 to 103. Among the new members are some key international organizations, thus reinforcing the sustainability of the Alliance.

13. Strengthening the community of the Group of Friends as one of the main pillars of the Alliance was a priority goal of the High Representative. This was achieved through a twofold approach. First, by convening regular meetings of the Group of Friends, who met four times during the year, twice at ministerial level and twice at Head of Mission level. Through these meetings the Group of Friends community has been increasingly active in engaging with the work of the Alliance, enriching its initiatives by providing ideas, insights and the necessary support; and by developing regular interaction at the secretariat level and at the political level. The High Representative particularly valued exchanges with and advice from Ministers and heads of international organizations, during country visits, bilateral meetings and ministerial sessions, which were attended in large numbers. In order to realize the full potential of the Group of Friends, a suggestion to develop a small number of thematic platforms involving countries with common concerns has been put forward and this process will be implemented in the near future.

Network of focal points of the Alliance

14. At the encouragement of the High Representative, members of the Group of Friends have appointed focal points mandated with overseeing the implementation of national plans and coordinating relations and activities with the Alliance secretariat. Since the beginning of the reporting period, 69 focal points have been appointed by countries and 14 by international organizations. The first focal points' meeting was held in Paris in October 2008. It allowed participants to learn about relevant intercultural programmes developed in different countries and regions of the world, share ideas and practices about the management of cultural diversity and develop new perspectives on the common challenges they face. A second meeting of the focal points was held immediately after the Istanbul Forum, building on the exchanges of the first gathering. The network of focal points has been further reinforced through one-on-one telephone conversations with the secretariat and the dissemination of a monthly newsletter, which allows prompt information-sharing and provides a platform for joint initiatives and collaborative efforts.

National plans and regional strategies for intercultural dialogue to advance the objectives of the Alliance of Civilizations

15. At the renewed urging of the High Representative, a number of new States members of the Group of Friends have either launched or continued work towards the adoption of national plans for intercultural dialogue to advance the goals of the Alliance and thus implement good governance of cultural diversity at the national level. Ten countries announced their national plans at the Istanbul Forum: Albania, Algeria, Argentina, Brazil, Montenegro, Portugal, Qatar, Romania, the Russian Federation and Slovenia. National plans had previously been adopted by Bulgaria, New Zealand, Spain, Turkey and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. A common feature of these national plans is that they directly address issues

of cultural diversity, promote intercultural links and help to build trust among diverse communities.

16. Regional strategies for Eastern European countries, the Euro-Mediterranean region and Ibero-American countries have also been announced, helping to extend the Alliance's reach. These regional strategies aim at helping countries facing similar challenges and confronted with identical problems to create common opportunities to address them, compare their approaches, share information about shortcomings, successes and lessons learned as well as to boost regional initiatives and regional coordination.

Strengthening the network of partnerships

17. Recognizing that its sustainability and effectiveness depend heavily on its capacity to interact with a wide range of partners, the Alliance continued to expand and deepen its network of partners, including international and multilateral organizations, civil society, youth, media and religious leaders, as well as the business sector. Developing this network helps to ensure that the Alliance achieves maximum impact in its efforts to promote intercultural understanding and good management of cultural diversity.

18. In that respect, the Alliance followed a two-pronged strategy: (a) bringing to bear the mobilizing power and networks of the Alliance to add value to initiatives and events developed by partner organizations; and (b) inviting partners of the Alliance to contribute their ideas, knowledge and expertise to help strengthen its projects (indeed, most Alliance projects are developed in collaboration with partners), reinforce the foundations upon which they are built, and provide opportunities for development and expansion.

19. Since May 2008, several cooperation agreements have been signed and a number of decisions were made at the international level recognizing the Alliance as a key partner, such as the decision of the members of the Union for the Mediterranean in July 2008 and the decision of the Ministerial Council of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) on the OSCE contribution to the implementation phase of the Alliance of Civilizations initiative, adopted at the Ministerial Council meeting in Helsinki in December 2008. Furthermore, in September 2008 the Alliance agreed on a joint action plan with the European Union and signed a memorandum of understanding with the Council of Europe. Both agreements provide impetus for developing concrete initiatives in a range of areas, including human rights, media, the promotion of cultural diversity, migration and the role of civil society in strengthening mutual understanding among diverse communities. At the Istanbul Forum, the Alliance signed new agreements with seven international organizations, with a view to leveraging networks and competitive advantage with its partners. The seven agreements have been signed with the International Organization for Migration, the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the Ibero-American General Secretariat, the Anna Lindh Foundation, the International Organization of la Francophonie, the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries and the Union Latine. Additionally, the Alliance is currently working towards developing partnerships with the Commonwealth, the African Union, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Asia-Europe Foundation, based in Singapore, with a view to signing memorandums of understanding in the near future.

20. The Alliance also focused its efforts on strengthening its cooperation with United Nations departments and agencies. In addition to supporting the work of the Secretary-General's Executive Office in matters relating to intercultural dialogue, the Alliance developed strong collaborative links with the Department of Public Information, the Global Compact, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). In this respect, the Alliance is particularly pleased to report on fruitful collaboration with the Department of Public Information, which has responded positively to its proposal to organize the second edition of the Global Model United Nations on the theme of the Alliance of Civilizations and intercultural dialogue and cooperation.

21. The Alliance further established platforms for cooperation with two important constituencies, namely, foundations and the private sector, following commitments made in Madrid that have now been implemented.

22. With respect to foundations, a meeting of about 20 heads and representatives of foundations from North America, Europe, the Middle East and Asia was held in Marrakech, Morocco, in February 2008. Following a commitment made in Madrid, the group decided to create an International Network of foundations. Its objective will be to strengthen collaboration among foundations and with the Alliance, to develop joint initiatives in the field of intercultural understanding and cooperation, and to provide a platform for exchange of knowledge and information.

23. Following another Madrid commitment, the Alliance launched a publication on the innovative role played by the business sector in managing cross-cultural diversity issues in the workplace, and across communities. Developed jointly with the United Nations Global Compact, the report, entitled *Doing Business in a Multicultural World: Challenges and Opportunities*, explores the cross-cultural challenges companies are facing, highlights good practices and lessons learned and illustrates why and how business can play a vital role in fostering intercultural understanding.

24. As a first example of cooperation with the private sector, the Alliance developed a close collaboration with a multinational company, CISCO, which put forward an innovative high-tech project aimed at creating a global network of "Dialogue Cafés" to favour intercultural dialogue and understanding worldwide and involving cities as main partners.

25. With respect to civil society organizations, the Alliance developed an extensive range of partnerships with two objectives: to expand the reach of United Nations Alliance of Civilizations initiatives and, secondly, to increase their impact. These partnerships were focused on increasing the visibility and exposure of related initiatives, extending the network of support and facilitating the implementation of related initiatives. In this area, several memorandums of understanding have been signed, including with academic and research institutions (in the context of the Alliance Research Network, the Alliance of Civilizations-UNESCO Network UNITWIN Chair on Media Literacy and Cross-Cultural Dialogue, and the Education about Religions and Beliefs Network); faith-based organizations (Religions for Peace); youth organizations; peacebuilding and conflict resolution non-governmental organizations (Club de Madrid, Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights); and associations of journalists (International Center for Journalists).

IV. Main initiatives and activities

26. The Alliance of Civilizations is a multi-stakeholders' initiative. With a clear mission, it convenes a variety of actors and ensures that dialogue translates into a coherent set of concrete actions. Some of these are conceived and implemented by the Alliance itself, through the secretariat. The Alliance also provides auspices, serves as a catalyst and facilitates implementation for a number of other initiatives. In the past year, it focused its efforts on implementing and consolidating programmes and projects that were launched at the Madrid Forum in January 2008 as well as on new initiatives that have been developed since then. The following short review describes initiatives ranging from those in which the Alliance has a lead implementing role to those where it acts as a facilitator.

27. The Alliance of Civilizations **Rapid Response Media Mechanism** was launched at the first Forum of the Alliance in Madrid, in January 2008. At the core of the Rapid Response Media Mechanism is an online resource of experts for journalists covering stories about cultural, religious and political tensions between communities, and across borders. Since the launch, the resource has grown to more than 100 experts. On average, three or four media blasts a month were sent to a constantly growing list of media contacts (currently over 7,000) to alert journalists about intercultural issues they might want to cover and offering names of experts prepared to comment on those issues. In order to help expand the use of the Rapid Response Media Mechanism resource, presentations were made at a number of international media events.

28. A partnership was developed with the European Commission and the Anna Lindh Foundation to develop a network of experts in the Euro-Mediterranean region to support the work of media professionals covering intercultural tensions and conflicts in the region. Following the Gaza crisis in January, the Alliance joined the European Commission and the Anna Lindh Foundation to organize a consultation with several journalists from the Euro-Mediterranean region on the role of the media and the challenges it faces when covering conflicts. The Rapid Response Media Mechanism project also helped to place 12 articles in international media by connecting journalists with experts who were witnessing events on the ground during the crisis.

29. Progress continued on the development of the **Alliance Clearing House**. The **Media Literacy Education Clearing House** (aocmedialiteracy.org) — a comprehensive online database of organizations, resources and best practices that help to combat cultural stereotypes and develop critical thinking skills to evaluate media messages — has become an internationally recognized portal with more than 16,000 unique visitors per month. Building on this success and the interest of its partner organizations (currently 33 in all regions of the world), the Alliance is coordinating the creation of a UNESCO UNITWIN Alliance of Civilizations Chair on Media Literacy and Cross-Cultural Dialogue. In cooperation with UNESCO, Grupo Comunicar and the European Commission, a publication was launched bringing together international experts' insights on media literacy policies (*Mapping Media Education Policies in the World: Visions, Programmes and Challenges*).

30. The construction of the **Education about Religions and Beliefs Clearing House** has been completed (aocerb.org). This online resource provides access to guidelines and other educational resources about the world's diverse religions and

beliefs as well as ethics education, tolerance education and civic education. It also includes a network of relevant organizations, a journal, a calendar of events, a forum and a news section. It is scheduled to be launched in mid-2009.

31. In parallel to that work, an **Alliance of Civilizations Research Network** is being developed. It brings together a small group of institutions from around the world that share an interest in the areas of work of the Alliance and are committed to encouraging cross-cultural educational exchanges.

32. The Alliance has also been playing a strong advocacy role to promote international student exchange programmes. In cooperation with other international partners, the Alliance has begun to help develop and disseminate projects that address the challenges of teaching about the "other" in the context of multicultural societies. The Istanbul Forum provided a key platform to advance work in this area.

33. Preparatory work was conducted early in 2009 on an **Alliance Fellowship Programme** designed to facilitate mutual, substantive and meaningful exposure for emerging leaders from North America, Europe and Muslim-majority countries to media, culture, politics, institutions, civil society and religion in one another's countries. The project was announced in Istanbul. It will become operational in the second half of 2009.

34. The pilot phase of the **Youth Solidarity Fund** was carried out as planned. Seed funding was provided to outstanding youth-led initiatives that promote long-term constructive relationships between young people from diverse cultural backgrounds. The six winners presented the results of their project at the Istanbul Forum. After analysis of the lessons learned and results of the pilot phase, the next phase of the programme should be launched on a wider scale late in 2009, subject to appropriate funding. Notably, activities in the area of youth have expanded considerably beyond the Fund itself.

35. In collaboration with youth partners, the Alliance developed a **Youth Strategy** which includes a series of Alliance-led initiatives to promote and strengthen the contribution of young people to advancing cross-cultural understanding and building inclusive societies. The Youth Strategy is centred on three mutually reinforcing objectives: awareness-raising, strengthening capacity and sharing information. It will be implemented in collaboration with several key partners such as multilateral organizations and regional youth platforms.

36. Construction of the **Youth Website** has also been completed. The website includes a clearinghouse which provides resources relevant to the advancement by young people of cross-cultural understanding. The website also offers a virtual meeting place for all those who are committed to youth participation in the creation of shared societies. The Youth Website is due to go online in mid-2009.

37. Launched at the Istanbul Forum, the **Global Youth Movement for the Alliance of Civilizations** aims to mobilize youth organizations and individuals and to strengthen commitment to the Alliance principles, foster dialogue and highlight concrete actions. Individual young people and youth organizations will be able to join this movement and report on their actions through the Youth Website.

38. In addition, a **Youth Advisory Committee** was created to give advice on the implementation and evaluation of the Youth Strategy and help to coordinate the Global Youth Movement along with existing regional youth platforms.

39. **Plural+**, a youth-produced video festival on migration, inclusiveness, identity and diversity was launched at the Istanbul Forum with the International Organization for Migration and other partners.

40. In the area of migration, which constitutes the fourth area of work identified in the report of the High-level Group, preliminary plans have been drawn up for a migration-integration clearing house, in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration.

41. The **Silatech** project announced at the Madrid Forum is now fully operational and details of its progress were reported in Istanbul, including on the alliances that it has established with global, regional and international partners to promote job creation, enterprise development and job placement. Silatech is an initiative of Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani and Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser al-Missned of Qatar. Silatech addresses the critical and growing need to generate jobs and economic opportunities for young people. The initiative promotes large-scale job creation, entrepreneurship, and access to capital and markets for young people, initially in the Arab world, which has the highest rate of youth unemployment. Through the High Representative, the Alliance is facilitating contacts between Silatech and the European Investment Bank with a view to developing a partnership.

42. The **Alliance Media Fund**, launched at the Madrid Forum as a related, autonomous project, expands the production of entertaining film, television and new media content that challenges common stereotypes and exposes audiences to more balanced representations of regions and cultures that are often ignored or negatively portrayed in mass media. In Istanbul, the Media Fund unveiled its three-part strategy, which includes conducting research to increase understanding of the impact of media on attitudes; raising awareness on the research findings through a global media-industry-targeted campaign; and producing and distributing content in film, television and new media that promote greater cross-cultural understanding

43. In collaboration with the Alliance of Civilizations, CISCO launched **Dialogue Café** at the Istanbul Forum. The project is based on a radical but simple idea: ordinary people have a great deal in common and given the opportunity will explore their common interests even across geopolitical divides. Dialogue Café links diverse groups of citizens from around the world through third-generation videoconferencing technology, thereby creating a new space for social innovation and exponentially expanding our ability to address common problems and innovate as a global community. This project is being implemented by a non-governmental organization created for this purpose and has already received the sponsorship of the Anna Lindh Foundation, United Cities and Local Governments, and the Gulbenkian Foundation.

44. In the wake of the Gaza crisis, a cluster of projects was jointly developed by the Alliance and partner organizations. Named **Restore Trust, Rebuild Bridges**, this initiative followed a meeting organized jointly by the Anna Lindh Foundation and the Alliance of Civilizations in February 2009, aimed at assessing the impact of the crisis in Gaza on relations among and within societies in the Euro-Mediterranean region. A series of joint actions were agreed upon to help restore trust in Euro-Mediterranean dialogue and rebuild human and cultural bridges among societies in the region. They involve the Anna Lindh Foundation, UNESCO, OIC, the Council of Europe, the European Union Commission and the Mediterranean

Universities Union (Unimed), among others, and received the support of several Governments.

45. With regard to the White Paper on the Israeli and Palestinian Conflict mentioned in the report of the High-level Group (presented in November 2006) for the Alliance of Civilizations, the High Representative carried out a number of consultations and initiatives during the past few months. Following his visit to Israel, Gaza and the West Bank in May 2008, the High Representative convened a follow-up meeting with members of the Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land in November 2008. In February 2009, he organized a brainstorming session with a number of scholars, political decision makers, artists and representatives of non-governmental organizations to address the White Paper issue. At the Istanbul Forum, he held a working breakfast session on the same subject. The outcome of those meetings was twofold: a "white paper" may be necessary but insufficient unless it is accompanied by a "white process" because narratives which develop during intractable conflicts have a severe impact on people's lives, at the mental level, and also on social interactions, attitudes and behaviours. These conclusions will now be translated into a concrete project to be implemented in the coming months aimed at promoting an inclusive dialogue process that engages peoples' hearts and minds.

46. During this time, the High Representative provided auspices to a series of initiatives for inclusive dialogue aimed at shaping a role for religion in the good governance of cultural diversity, addressing the topic of relations between secular and religious political movements and identifying ways to defuse tensions and overcome suspicion between secular and religious political actors.

V. Second Forum of the Alliance

47. The Second Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations mobilized a wide range of committed partners, from international organizations to media, from Governments to civil society, and from religious leaders to young people. On 6 and 7 April 2009, more than 1,500 participants — among them several Heads of Government, over 50 Ministers, as well as policymakers, foundations, media and grass-roots leaders from around the world — convened in Istanbul to forge new partnerships and generate ideas aimed at building trust and cooperation among diverse communities. The Forum also served as an opportunity to take stock of initiatives developed by the Alliance of Civilizations and to launch practical projects in collaboration with civil society and corporate partners.

48. The Alliance of Civilizations Forum provided participants with an insider's look into the work of the Alliance, and progress reports on its main activities and achievements. The feedback and input received at the Forum will help to shape these initiatives, ensuring that they continue to respond to needs on the ground. The Alliance has also benefited from the insights of partners who can help to increase the reach and impact of Alliance projects.

49. In addition to providing a platform to launch new initiatives and take stock of existing Alliance projects, the Forum allowed participants to take part in discussions that helped to advance the debate on key issues of concern to the Alliance. These include issues such as the role of youth in promoting intercultural understanding, city diplomacy, formal and informal education, the role of women in a culture of

peace, reporting across cultural divides, the challenge of integrating migrants into multicultural societies, the cost of conflict in the Middle East, competing narratives of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, and engaging non-State actors in resolving conflicts.

50. Moreover, the Forum included a marketplace of ideas, featuring some of the world's most exciting, innovative and lesser-known civil society projects aimed at advancing intercultural understanding. The goal of the marketplace was to showcase grass-roots projects which are unique, but also have the potential to be scaled up and replicated in communities around the world. A total of 18 projects were presented. By raising the profile of those projects to an audience of leaders from Governments, international organizations, business, religion, civil society and academia, the Alliance sought to inspire new thinking about current challenges, and to connect some of the world's most dynamic civil society entrepreneurs with decision makers who have the ability to give their work greater visibility and impact.

51. The outcomes of Istanbul confirmed the threefold importance of the Alliance Forum (a) as a platform for inclusive dialogue that convenes different kinds of players who jointly identify problems, challenges and opportunities and exchange information and good practices; (b) as an opportunity to consolidate partners' commitments to the objectives of the Alliance of Civilizations, giving it extra leverage and allowing it to gain momentum; and (c) as a place to create and seize opportunities for advocacy, communication activities and social mobilization.

52. In the light of the availability expressed by the countries participating, the High Representative, at the closing session, confirmed that Brazil would host the next Forum of the Alliance in May 2010, Qatar in 2011 and Austria in 2012, and expressed his deep satisfaction with this prospect.

VI. Outreach

53. Raising the profile of the Alliance remained one of the key priorities during the past year. Through its expanding network of partners, the Alliance succeeded in increasing its visibility, particularly within the United Nations system, among international organizations and in the civil society community. Efforts have also been made to ensure that the Alliance, its goals and projects are better known among the media and the general public.

54. Although more needs to be done to raise the profile of the Alliance, significant progress was made in the realm of media, particularly at the time of the Istanbul Forum, which provided a critical opportunity to showcase the work of the Alliance. During that period, more than 900 articles were published about the Alliance in multiple languages. They include reports, news stories and comment articles, including by prominent personalities connected to the Alliance, such as Alliance Ambassadors. In addition, op-eds by the High Representative published by major international media outlets helped to promote the vision of the Alliance and showcase its efforts to promote trust and understanding across cultures.

55. Improvements were made to the Alliance website and, as a result, traffic continued to increase. There were nearly 250,000 visitors to the Alliance website (www.unaoc.org) from June 2008 to May 2009, representing 3.4 million hits. The

Alliance also acquired an online social networking presence, and membership in the Alliance's Facebook group grew to more than 1,600 members.

56. The appointment in October of a number of Alliance of Civilizations Ambassadors (all former members of the High-level Group for the Alliance) also helped to raise the visibility of the Alliance's work. Ambassadors took part in a number of high-level meetings and presented the mission and objectives of the Alliance at international gatherings.

VII. Governance: secretariat and Trust Fund

57. While maintaining a very small structure, the Alliance secretariat appointed a Director and recruited a Strategic Partnerships Manager and a Research Manager. The former acting director provides occasional inputs on specific issues as a senior adviser.

58. With 10 members under various types of fixed-term contracts, the secretariat is now fully staffed. In addition, to support its day-to-day activities and supplement human resources needs, during this period the secretariat made increased use of United Nations interns. In May 2009, the Alliance team was further reinforced with an additional member on secondment from the Government of Switzerland, for an initial period of 12 months.

59. Given the ever-increasing amount of work and demands made on the Alliance secretariat, the High Representative would like to broaden the use of the secondment formula not only from Governments but also from international organizations as a good trade-off between flexibility and the ability of the Alliance to meet the expectations placed on it.

60. The Alliance of Civilizations Trust Fund continued to grow, but at a rate which has become too slow to match the expansion of its activities. On the other hand, given that during the whole period of the implementation of the first action plan the Alliance grew more than 100 per cent in membership, in terms of available resources it has stagnated or even shrunk. Between 1 May 2008 and 31 May 2009, the Alliance attracted over US$ 2.25 million in financial support from 13 countries and one international organization, including seven first-time contributors, out of 103 members of the Group of Friends.

61. The strong support of the Secretary-General, as reflected on several occasions, particularly in his letter to Foreign Ministers in May 2009, requesting contributions to the Trust Fund, is an important contribution to the Alliance's fund-raising efforts, which will need to be urgently stepped up.

62. Following the Istanbul Forum, the High Representative launched a new fund-raising strategy aimed at enabling the Alliance to operate during the next two years of the coming implementation plan on a more efficient basis and with an adequate level of financial resources.

63. This strategy focuses first and foremost on members of the Group of Friends but will be extended to foundations, the corporate sector and individuals.

VIII. Conclusion

64. During the past 12 months much has been achieved to fully implement the first action plan of the Alliance (2007-2009), which helped to establish the Alliance as a central player in mobilizing forces concerned with promoting intercultural dialogue and the good governance of cultural diversity. However, efforts must continue to consolidate its role as the main United Nations platform for dealing with the good governance of cultural diversity, expand the Alliance's network of support, and secure the sustainability of the initiative at both the organizational and the financial levels.

65. The second implementation plan of the Alliance (2009-2011) should build on the successes achieved so far and aim at consolidating and making these achievements sustainable. In particular, the Alliance must continue to strengthen the Group of Friends network, encouraging sustained efforts to develop and implement national plans and regional strategies for intercultural dialogue and creating opportunities to provide countries with appropriate tools to bridge divides effectively. The Alliance also has to reinforce its global scope and to expand its international reach to countries in South America, Africa and Asia.

66. To increase its efficiency, the Alliance must strengthen existing partnerships and enhance cooperation with relevant United Nations departments and agencies, particularly with UNESCO, as well as with other relevant international organizations showing a strong will to cooperate and develop joint actions.

67. Regarding the sustainability of the Alliance in organizational and financial terms, extra efforts have to be made to consolidate its working structures worldwide as well as its Trust Fund. Better coordination with agencies and specialized bodies of the United Nations system, as well as with other organizations or regional processes, has to be worked out and implemented at local level over the coming years. Fundraising should receive special attention in order to build a body of committed supporters — including Governments, international organizations, foundations and the corporate sector.

68. Furthermore, regarding the development of the Alliance's media outreach, implementing an effective global communications strategy should also be among the priorities.

69. Finally, the Alliance's voice on the international stage will have to be strengthened, in particular through the High Representative's role in supporting the international community's efforts to prevent interreligious and intercultural conflicts and to promote a global partnership for peace.